

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: August 10, 2017

Agenda Item: Middle Madison Valley Trumpeter Swan Reintroduction

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 Min

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Background: Reintroduction of captive-raised trumpeter swans into suitable nesting areas is a proven management tool in Montana and neighboring states. FWP has been releasing trumpeter swans as part of a Commission-approved project since 2012, but proposes to continue restoration efforts for another five-year time frame, 2017-2021, with the goal of establishing a breeding flock of five established nesting pairs in the middle Madison Valley of southwest Montana. Similar projects in Montana have shown that nesting initiates in year 6-7, so we are hopeful that nesting will start in the proposed time frame.

We want to increase swan production in the Middle Madison Valley and enhance connectivity between flocks in the Tri-state region of Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming. In April, the Commission endorsed FWP doing an EA. That EA was out for public comment for 30 days and received 34 comments, all supportive. The Decision Notice found no significant impacts on the human and physical environments associated with this project. The EA and Decision Notice are in the Commission Packet.

FWP now seeks Commission approval to proceed with the release of about five swans this summer, and to continue similar releases each year through 2021 until five breeding pairs are established in the Madison or until monitoring indicates the project should be discontinued. FWP will obtain captive-reared swans from the Wyoming Wetlands Society facility in Jackson, Wyoming. We will release birds at the 10,000-acre O'Dell Creek Headwaters wetlands between Quake and Ennis Lakes east of the Madison River. This area has extensive wetlands, spring creeks, streams, and riparian areas. Primary funding will be raised by partner contributions from conservation agencies and organizations, as well as private individuals/foundations.

Trumpeter Swans

- Historically nested in western Montana Valleys but were extirpated during European settlement. Swans for reintroduction into Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming are available through a cooperative program with the Pacific Flyway Council, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Wyoming Wetland Society.
- Wyoming Wetland Society trumpeters have been used for releases in the Green River of Wyoming and the Flathead, Mission and Blackfoot Valleys of Montana. In all cases, wild nesting flocks resulted after about five to seven consecutive years of releases. Releases in the Blackfoot began in 2005 and resulted in two wild nesting pairs in 2011 and seven pairs successfully fledged broods in 2016.
- There has been significant habitat restoration in the middle Madison Valley between Ennis and Quake Lakes for almost 15 years with funding from FWP, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, North Western Energy, and others. Over 1,000 wetland acres drained in the early 1950s have been restored and enhanced.
- Montana is one of three states committed to implementing the Trumpeter Swan Implementation Plan. Its goal is the slow growth in the number of trumpeter swans breeding in SE Idaho, western Montana, and NW Wyoming. Restoring the Madison flock will help achieve that goal.

Public Involvement Process & Results: Public comments on the EA were taken for 30 days. Thirty-four e/mails and one letter were received, all supportive. Commenters supported restoring trumpeters to their native range and applauded FWP's success with this project so far and its community involvement. There were no comments raising concerns or in opposition.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP as a partner with Idaho and Wyoming is committed to restoring breeding trumpeters to appropriate habitats within their historic range.

Proposed Motion: I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission endorse FWP to proceed with continuation of trumpeter swan reintroductions in the Madison Valley as presented by FWP.